Reporter Says JFK Panel Tricked Him

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

A Los Angeles newsman accused investigators for the House Assassinations Commitee yesterday of "thoroughly deceitful" tactics in using him as a go-between to subpoena an unsuspecting witness.

Art Kevin, an investigative reporter for Los Angeles' radio station KMPC, charged that two House committee staffers tricked him into arranging a meeting there Thursday—at which Kevin said he was supposed to be present—with a soldier of fortune named Loran Eugene Hall.

" 'We only want to question him. We just want to talk to him,' " Kevin quoted Kenneth D. Klein, an assistant deputy chief counsel for the Assassinations Committee, as stating.

But when Hall showed up and Kevin refused to leave, chief committee investigator Clifford A. Fenton dug into a brief and served Hall with a subpoena that had been signed in Washington a week earlier, on May 13.

"As a newsman, I feel misused and abused," Kevin said, adding that Hall, a longtime acquaintance, insisted that he be present for any questioning. "They [the House staffers] knew they were never going to talk to Hall in front of me. Now they've turned him into a hostile witness. Hall told them, 'You'll get me back to Washington but you're going to get a polite string of fifths [invocations of the Fifth Amendment]"

The subpoena given Hall, who had figured in the Warren Commission investigation of President Kennedy's assassination, directed him to appear in Washington June 7. It was signed by Rep. Richardson Preyer (D-N.C.), chairman of the subcommittee in charge of the JFK inquiry.

Asked about the incident, acting committee staff director Thomas W. Lambeth said he did not believe any misrepresentations had been made. He said Preyer had spoken with Klein about the matter by telephone and it was Preyer's understanding "that there was never any agreement that the radio man [Kevin] could be present."

Lambeth also insisted that the committee investigators would not have served the subpoena if they could have interviewed Hall privately. Lambeth indicated the two staffers would have been reprimanded severely if they had failed to do one or the other. "The subpoena," he said, "was a protection against a witness leaving the country."

Hall was originally named in the Warren report as an anti-Castro activist who visited the Dallas apartment of Sylvia Odio in late September, 1963, with two other men. Odio said the visitors spoke to her of killing the President; she also said one of them, whom she later identified as Lee Harvey Oswald, was introduced to her as "Leon Oswald."

The FBI said Hall told them he had been one of the visitors but he later denied that, as did his two supposed companions.

Kevin said investigator Fenton told him over the phone in early May that they wanted to speak with Hall because " 'we've been talking to a lot of people all over the country who say he's the assassin or one of the assassins.' "

The radio newsman added in a telephone interview that he persuaded Hall to meet with the House staffers to "set the record straight."

"I told them, 'I'm sure he'll ask that I be present,' " Kevin recalled. "Fenton said, 'Sure, no problem.' Klein said, 'Yeah, we've got some sensitive areas to touch on, but it's okay.' "